

Message Text

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44

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

NSAE-00 SIL-01 EA-07 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 L-03 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 TRSE-00

CIEP-01 /078 W

----- 002386

R 141152Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA BAHRAIN

TO AMEMBASSY SEOUL KOREA

INFO AMCONSUL DHAHRAN SAUDI ARABI

AMEMBASSY DOHA QATAR

AMEMBASSY JIDDA SAUDI ARABIA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY SANA YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN IRAN

SECSTATE WASHINGTON DC 3375

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y A D D I N G S E O U L A S A D D R E S E E

E.O. 11652 : N/A

TAGS : EALR, EFIN, ELAB, SA, BA, KS

SUBJECT : KOREAN LABOR IN BAHRAIN

REF : (A) DHAHRAN 1008 (B) SEOUL 6284 (NOTAL)
(C) MANAMA 930 (NOTAL, BEING REPEATED SEOUL)

1. THE NUMBER OF KOREAN WORKERS IN BAHRAIN HAS NOT YET
REACHED SUCH PROPORTIONS AS TO LEAD BAHRAINIS TO CONSIDER
THEM A PROBLEM OF THE SORT THAT MAY BE BREWING IN THE
EASTERN PROVINCE OF SAUDI ARABIA (REF A). THERE ARE
PRESENTLY ABOUT TWO THOUSAND SOUTH KOREANS WORKING IN
BAHRIN. TO THE BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE, ALL ARE WORKING
FOR HYUNDAI CONSTRUCTION CO. WHICH IS ABOUT HALFWAY THROUGH

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ITS CONTRACT TO BUILD THE MAJOR, OAPEC-FINANCED, ARAB SHIP-
BUILDING AND REPAIR YARD (ASRY). WORK IS REPORTEDLY RUNNING
AHEAD OF SCHEDULE WHICH IF NOT UNPRECEDENTED, IS CLOSE TO
BEING SO IN THIS AREA.

2. THAT SAID, HOWEVER, WE ALSO HEAR SOME OF THE COMMENTS AND SENSE SOME OF THE AMBIVALENT FEELINGS LOCAL PEOPLE HAVE TOWARD THE KOREANS --WHO, AS IN SAUDI ARABIA, ARE RESPECTED AND FEARED FOR THEIR HARD WORK AND EFFICIENCY. ON THE ONE HAND, AND THEIR QUASI-MILITARY APPEARANCE AND ORGANIZATION, ON THE OTHER. BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE ASKED THE CHARGE AS RECENTLY AS LAST WEEK IF IT WERE TRUE THAT THE KOREAN WORKMEN ARE SECONDED TO HYUNDAI FROM THE MILITARY AND ARE THUS A KIND OF LARGE SCALE PEACE CORPS, WORKING FOR VOLUNTEER WAGES AS A NATIONAL SERVICE.

3. BAHRAINIS ARE NOTABLY RELAXED ABOUT THE FOREIGN LABORERS IN THEIR MIDST (SEE REF C) AND USUALLY THE FOREIGNERS FEEL SIMILARY. THE KOREANS, AS A GROUP, HAVE PERHAPS BEEN THE MOST STANDOFFISH (THEY ARE ONLY JUST BEGINNING TO FREQUENT THE LOCAL BARS AND SPEND THEIR FRIDAY HOLIDAYS SPENDING IN THE SUQ). THAT CULTURAL TRAIT, PLUS THE FACT THAT THEY ARE ISOLATED IN THEIR CONSTRUCTION SITE AWAY FROM THE MAIN POPULATION CENTERS OF BAHRAIN, HAS GIVEN RISE TO SEVERAL FANTASTIC BUT PERHAPS ILLUMINATING STORIES. ONE OF THE MOST EXTREME IS THAT THEY (AND THEIR FELLOW WORKERS IN KUWAIT AND SAUDI ARABIA) ARE THE ADVANCE SHOCK TROOPS FOR THE AMERICAN TAKEOVER OF THE GULF IN THE CASE OF ANOTHER ARAB DECISION TO DENY PETROLEUM TO THE WEST.

4. ANOTHER FACTOR WHICH MAY SEEM STRANGE IN SEOUL IS THAT THERE IS A LOCAL CULTURAL PREJUDICE AT PLAY. MOST BAHRAINIS, AS WITH OTHER ARABS, KNOW OF THE FAR EAST AS THE LAND OF KUNG FU, BRUCE LEE, KARATE, ETC. THIS THEY LEARNED IN THE LOCAL CINEMAS (BEFORE SUCH MOVIES AND THE POPULAR CLUBS WHICH TAUGHT THOSE SPORTS WERE BANNED BY THE GOVERNMENT AS BEING POTENTIAL THREATS TO PUBLIC ORDER). FOR MANY OF THE YOUNGER BAHRAINIS THEREFORE EVERY KOREAN IS A WALKING BRUCE LEE. THEY BOTH LIKE IT AND FEAR IT.

5. NOTE: WHILE THE HYUNDAI WORKERS FIRST SPENT EVEN THEIR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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LEISURE HOURS (WHAT LITTLE THERE SEEMED TO BE) IN THEIR OFFICIAL WORK UNIFORMS, THEY NOW APPEAR IN PUBLIC IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES AND IN TWOS OR THREES RATHER THAN THE GROUPS OF TEN AND TWENTY WHICH WAS THE CASE EARLIER.

6. COMMENT: IF THE KOREANS ARE LOOKING FOR SOME GRATUITOUS ADVICE IT WOULD BE THIS: IF THEY'RE INTERESTED IN A LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GULF, TEACH THEIR WORKMEN SOME ARABIC AND ENGLISH AND LET THEM (ENCOURAGE THEM TO) MINGLE INDIVIDUALLY WITH THE LOCAL POPULATION. BURLEIGH

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 15 SEP 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MIGRATORY WORKERS, SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY, CONSTRUCTION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 14 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: izenbei0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976MANAMA01174
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: n/a
Film Number: D760313-0698
From: MANAMA BAHRAIN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t197608103/baaaesqt.tel
Line Count: 109
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: izenbei0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 01 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <01 JUN 2004 by ElyME>; APPROVED <24 SEP 2004 by izenbei0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: KOREAN LABOR IN BAHRAIN
TAGS: EALR, EFIN, ELAB, SA, BA, KS, HYUNDAI CONSTRUCTION CO
To: SEOUL KOREA INFO DHAHRAN SAUDI ARABI
DOHA QATAR
JIDDA SAUDI ARABIA
KUWAIT KUWAIT
SANA YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC
TEHRAN IRAN

STATE WASHINGTON DC

Type: TE

Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006